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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN AND EAP/CM, SOUTHCOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: COSTA RICA NAMES AMBASSADOR TO CHINA

REF: SAN JOSE 01322 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Arias administration has wasted no time in naming its new Ambassador to China, Antonio BURGUES Teran. Burgues, an economist by training, Arias confidant, former PLN party treasurer and ex-GOCR minister, was sworn in on August 1. He hopes to have a five-officer team join him at the new Costa Rican embassy in Beijing in September. In public comments, Burgues has echoed the Arias administration's optimism that Costa Rican niche products will find a significant market in China. See biographic information in para 5. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) China continues to be a 'flavor of the month' in Costa Rican foreign relations. Burgues, name surfaced in the media in mid-July, but he reportedly had been selected by President Oscar Arias in late June, just weeks after Costa Rica's recognition of China. Burgues, a first-time diplomat, told interviewers that he does not seek a large embassy, just an 'effective' one. Among his top goals: opening commercial relations, promoting tourism and seeking Chinese support for Costa Rican global (and UN) policy initiatives. The Ministry of Foreign Trade (COMEX), meanwhile, has fed a steady stream of media reports touting the enormous size of the Chinese market, the hoped-for appetite for Costa Rican products, and the (positive) implications of Chinese relations on eventual APEC membership for Costa Rica. Some commentators have even implied (erroneously) that improved trade ties with China might help compensate for Costa Rica's not joining CAFTA, if that proves to be the case after the October 7 referendum.

¶3. (SBU) For his part, Chinese Ambassador Wang Xiaoyuan has carefully played down prospects for Costa Rica's immediate entry into APEC, citing the long-standing and complex moratorium issue. At the same time, he and VP Kevin Casas will be the major attractions at an August 7 conference in San Jose, organized by the national chamber of business chambers (UCCAEP) on doing business with China.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: If relations with China were inevitable for Costa Rica, some parts of the GOCR and some sectors of the public are still adjusting to the suddenness of the shift in ties from Taipei to Beijing. The Air Unit of the Ministry of Public Security, for example, has had to scramble to find funding to complete refurbishment of an aging C-7 Caribou transport it hopes to put back in service. The Taiwanese had been helping with the funding. Also, in the most recent CID-Gallup poll (released July 27), the second-most cited criticism of the Arias administration, by

those who mentioned something specific, was the break with Taiwan. The GOCR,s push for CAFTA approval was the most-cited criticism. (Neither was cited by a large percentage of those polled, however.) END COMMENT.

15. (U) BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON ANTONIO BURGUES:

Born: June 11, 1953 in Spain. He is a naturalized Costa Rican citizen.

Background:

- Economist by training
- VP of BCT Bank, 2007
- President of CADEXCO, the Costa Rican Chamber of Exporters, 1994-2006
- Minister of Economy, Industry and Trade, 1986-1990 (during 1st Arias administration)
- Former PLN Party Treasurer

Personal: He is married (Loma Chavarria), with seven children. He speaks English and Spanish.

HENIFIN